

FINAL

TOWN OF ACTON
WASTEWATER ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD TASKFORCE

(WANT)

MINUTES

March 2, 2011

7:00 p.m.

Council On Aging Facility

Present: Peter Mosbach, Mike Geis, Kent Sharp, Mark Tawa, Janet Adachi.

Town Staff: Doug Halley

Visitors: Holly Ben-Joseph, Kerry Byrne, Gary Chase, Carolyn Dittes, Doug Edwards, Al English, Rebecca Germonprez, Kristen Harrigan, Tom Heinlein, Anne Heinlein, Jack Landers, Tom Lemaire, Michael Margolis, David Mayall, Lauren Rosenzweig Morton, Ron Parenti, Barry Rosen, Diane Schaumburg.

Peter Mosbach called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

I. Citizens Concerns. None.

II. Approval of Minutes. The minutes of 1/4/2011 were tabled until the next meeting.

III. Presentation: "Financial Analysis and Impact Study, Area 10 (S-T-F) - Sewer vs. Septics 2012." By Al English, with Mike providing significant assistance in organizing the material on the slides. Mike audio-recorded the presentation. Mr. English started by reviewing the history of the Committee, noting that in August 2010, the focus shifted to the cost issue, which is when he made his first presentation. His second presentation was in late 2010. Today's presentation will consider how assuming a second septic system at Year 30 would affect the overall cost.

Mr. English said his presentation would show that sewers would be more expensive throughout, that is, no septic system would cost more at any point than sewers, with the exception of an innovative alternative system at Years 40-70, with the assumption of septic replacement at Year 10, Year 40 and Year 70. So the reasons favoring sewers, if costs do not come down, must be something other than costs.

If sewer reserves are not sufficient to cover the cost of the treatment plant, etc., what happens? The additional cost is borne by the users.

If there are two homeowners, one obligated for the betterment fee, and one on septic for 10 years, and both decide to sell, what result? If both pass Title V, the person who has paid the betterment fee has paid \$30,000 needlessly. If both fail Title V, only the installation of an innovative alternative septic system at approximately \$45,000 would be more expensive than hooking up to sewers at approximately \$42,500.

Acton's sewer rates are high because there are fewer users. What are the ways to reduce sewer costs?

Betterment charge - reduce from 7500 to 4K (5% reduction) or to 2K (10% reduction)

Increase sewer betterment units (SBUs)

Use same contractor for multiple hookups

Reduce rates by adding users
Improve betterment loan rate -difficult

Mr. English suggested that if Tuttle really has a ledge problem, perhaps it would be better, less expensive for the rest of the neighborhood to exclude Tuttle from the scope of any sewerage option. He also observed that an existing septic tank could be adapted to serve as the pump-housing in a lower-pressure sewer system, as has been done elsewhere, including possibly in Scituate. If the power went out, the homeowner still would have 800 gallons of capacity available before the power-loss became a problem. Paying to clean out the septic tank would be cheaper than the cost of a separate housing.

The sewer rates are a big reason that the monthly cost of sewers is so high. If the Town can get the sewerage cost down, that could make sewerage competitive with the septic option.

The cost per month for a 49K loan for septic would equal the current cost of sewers per month. At the end of 30 years, the cost of sewers would be 107K, as compared to the 92K cost of septic.

An audience member asked what the impact would be if sewerage were approved for an area where a resident had just put in a new septic system. Mr. English suggested that sewerage could be dismissed as an option for the area; the Town should agree that residents in the area need not hook up as long as their septic systems work; and the Town should reduce the betterment charges for those properties.

An audience member asked why, if 60% of SBUs are users, the use after eight years still is not at 100%. Mr. English thinks that the cost of hookup is an issue. The town needs to make the price competitive to motivate people to hook up.

Mr. English said that sewers should be a Town issue and solution. Other towns share in the cost of sewerage, but Acton does not.

Mr. English offered a draft recommendation for the Committee's consideration that would delay a formal Town Meeting sewerage proposal for 3-5 years. Committee members agreed that they wanted time to review Mr. English's presentation and draft recommendation, and to discuss at the next meeting. The Committee thanked Mr. English for today's presentation, as well as his past presentations, all of which have been very helpful to the Committee.

Adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

- Janet Adachi

Documents Discussed at Meeting and Attached:

- Minutes of 1/4/2011
Presentation: "Financial Analysis and Impact Study, Area 10 (S-T-F) - Sewer vs. Septics 2012" (58 pages). By Al English